UNITED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Entry into force of Law of Sea Convention marks new era in international relations, Secretary-General tells Assembly of International Seabed Authority in Jamaica.

+ Security Council, in Presidential statement, welcomes Iraqi recognition of Kuwait as significant step towards implementation of relevant resolutions.

+ Secretary-General proposes Major-General Daniel Schroeder of United States as next Force Commander of UNMIH military component; Chief Superintendent Neil Pouliot of Canada to head police component.

+ Government of Angola and UNITA confirm intention to sign Lusaka Protocol on Sunday; agree to truce until cease-fire takes effect.

+ Inter-Agency Standing Committee on Somalia urges Security Council to consider arrangements for protected humanitarian bases before withdrawal of UNOSOM II.

+ United Nations high-level mission to visit Liberia and ECOWAS States for consultations on international response to Liberian situation.

+ Peace-keeping operations need well-defined mandates, unified command and control, adequate financing and enhanced training, speakers tell Special Political and Decolonization Committee.

+ Legal Committee approves draft resolution which would have General Assembly adopt convention on safety of United Nations and associated personnel.

+ Committee on Palestinian Rights reaffirms permanent United Nations responsibility concerning Palestine question until comprehensive settlement is reached.

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The information media service of the United Nations

The entry into force today of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea is a historic achievement, according to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. In a statement to the first meeting of the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority in Kingston, Jamaica, he said the Convention marked a new era in international relations. By providing rules for the high seas and a legal framework for the use of marine resources, it established a more equitable relationship among States.

The Law of the Sea Convention advanced both of the fundamental aims for which the United Nations had been created, by enhancing international peace and security and promoting global development, the Secretary-General continued. It also strengthened the most necessary of all political principles -- the principle of the rule of law.

At a luncheon hosted by Governor-General Sir Howard Cooke, the Secretary-General expressed appreciation for Jamaica's long-standing commitment to the United Nations. He also noted the country's role as a founder member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), its active involvement in the Organization of American States (OAS), and its contribution to efforts to restore democracy in Haiti.

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The Security Council today welcomed Iraq's irrevocable and unqualified recognition of Kuwait's sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence and international boundaries. In a statement read out by its President, Madeleine Albright (United States), the Council described the Iraqi decision as a significant step towards implementation of its resolutions.

The Council went on to say that it would closely follow Iraq's implementation of that decision. It would also continue to keep under review the country's actions to complete its compliance with all relevant resolutions.

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In a meeting with President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in Haiti yesterday, the Secretary-General proposed that Major-General Daniel Schroeder of the United States be the next Force Commander of the military component of the United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH). He also proposed Chief Superintendent Neil Pouliot of Canada as head of the Mission's police component, according to a United Nations spokesman. President Aristide accepted those proposals.

The spokesman noted that Major-General Schroeder and Chief Superintendent Pouliot would operate under the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Haiti, Lakhdar Brahimi. Meanwhile, the Secretary-General has appointed Major-General Manfred Eisele, a German national, as the new Assistant Secretary-General for Planning and Support in the Department of Peace-keeping Operations.

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The Government of Angola and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) have confirmed that they will sign the Lusaka Protocol on Sunday. They have also agreed to establish a truce as of 8:00 p.m. today, local time, until the cease-fire provided for in the Protocol comes into effect. That agreement was reached after the parties met in the Zambian capital with Special Representative Alioune Blondin Beye and the representatives of the three Observer States -- the United States, the Russian Federation and Portugal.

According to the agreement, the Angolan Armed Forces (FAA) and the UNITA military forces will refrain from carrying out attacks against each other. It says that the truce will benefit the environment in which the parties discuss certain issues prior to the signing of the Lusaka Protocol, and the consequent establishment of the cease-fire.

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The Inter-Agency Standing Committee on Somalia has urged the Security Council to consider arrangements for the establishment of protected humanitarian bases before the termination of the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II) next March. In a statement transmitted to the Council by the Secretary-General, the Committee stressed the need to ensure an orderly transition to the traditional mandates of United Nations agencies. The Council should authorize the transfer of UNOSOM II equipment and assets to operational United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, and make core UNOSOM II humanitarian and security staff available as soon as possible. In addition, security requirements should be funded by a special allocation so as not to divert voluntary funds from humanitarian activities.

The Committee said United Nations agencies working in Somalia were committed to continuing emergency and rehabilitation activities beyond the expiration of the UNOSOM II mandate. However, the security situation in most parts of the country had deteriorated steadily this year. The withdrawal of United Nations forces in the absence of a political settlement would exacerbate the situation and could result in the cessation of humanitarian activities in some areas. In that case, any natural disaster or a return to generalized lawlessness would rapidly degenerate into a predictable new humanitarian emergency, the Committee warned.

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The United Nations today dispatched a high-level mission to visit Liberia and member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), according to a spokesman for the Organization. The mission will consult on how the international community can best deal with the situation in Liberia. It is being lead by Assistant Secretary-General Lansana Kouyate of the Department of Political Affairs.

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Increasingly complex peace-keeping operations need well-defined mandates, unified command and control, adequate financing and enhanced training, the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) was told today, as it continued its comprehensive review of peace-keeping. Speakers highlighted the need to seek political solutions to conflicts, as well as to address their underlying economic and social causes. They also stressed the importance of consultations among the Security Council, Secretariat and troop contributors, and of the General Assembly's active involvement in matters involving international peace and security.

Representatives voiced support for the development of stand-by arrangements for troops and equipment, so that peace-keeping forces could be rapidly deployed. The importance of developing a set of guidelines for the conduct of peace-keeping operations to replace the current ad hoc approach was stressed. Speakers also said that resources should not be diverted from development to peace-keeping.

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Acting without a vote, the Sixth Committee (Legal) today approved a draft resolution which would have the General Assembly adopt and open for signature a convention on the safety of United Nations and associated personnel. It would also have the Assembly urge States to take all appropriate measures to ensure the safety and security of such personnel within their territory.

Annexed to the text is a 29-article draft convention, resulting from the work of an Ad Hoc Committee established last year. The draft convention defines what is meant by United Nations, and associated personnel, and addresses matters such as the duties of States to ensure the safety and security of those personnel.

Yesterday, the Russian Federation proposed the convening of a peace conference to conclude the United Nations Decade of International Law (1990-1999). The country's representative noted that such a conference would be the third in a series, following those of 1889 and 1907. It would focus on the peaceful settlement of disputes and the formation of an international criminal justice system, and would provide a forum for examination of fundamental legal problems of the twenty-first century.

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The Committee on the Rights of the Palestinian People has reaffirmed the permanent responsibility of the United Nations concerning the question of Palestine until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is reached. It also reaffirmed that a settlement must be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973); Israel's withdrawal from Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem; and the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, particularly the right to self-determination.

In approving its annual report to the General Assembly, the Committee expressed support for broadening its membership and cited the usefulness of

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its seminars on economic and social issues confronting the Palestinians. It emphasized the role of the Division for Palestinian Rights as a centre for research, monitoring, and the collection and dissemination of information. The Committee also cited the useful role played by the Department of Public Information (DPI) in raising international awareness of the complexities of the question.

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